Anne's presentation to the Monroe County Legislators on 10/10/06

My name is Anne Tischer. I am here to urge the legislature to go on the record in support of marriage equality for same sex couples, as the Rochester City Council recently did.

There is an economic reason why you should:

My spouse Bess and I got married in Canada and it cost us $500.00. That money should have gone into Rochester's economy. And if we could have legally married here, we would have spent another $5000.00 for a reception for our friends and family. We know a dozen other gay couples ready to have a wedding.

Typical gay couples have two incomes, few or no dependents and so have more disposable income. Gays will put 641 billion dollars into the US economy this year.

My point? Think outside the box, about what this means to Monroe County economically. Marriage equality IS coming. Monroe County should position itself now to tap into the new revenue stream it will generate.

Put out a welcome mat for same sex couples. Aim to make Monroe County a marriage destination. To attract gay couples, celebrate Rochester's history of fostering social change; promote the Susan Anthony House; invest in a Frederick Douglass festival. Sell our legacy of equal rights movements as a tourist attraction and include gay civil rights.

Rochester has the oldest gay newspaper in the state. Our Image Out film festival draws in thousands of out of town tourists and this years gay pride parade had 10,000 spectators according to the Democrat and Chronicle.

Obviously, there is a window of economic opportunity here but we have to demonstrate that we want it. So I am asking you, the Monroe County Legislature to please send Albany a open letter stating that it makes economic sense to support marriage equality in New York State. Thank you.

Good Afternoon. My name is Bess Watts from Open Arms Metropolitan Community Church. My partner, Anne Tischer and I, have been together 11 years and were recently married in Canada. I am here to speak on behalf of Monroe County's gay and lesbian employees and ask that you provide Domestic Partner benefits.

As part of Monroe County's non-discrimination policy, sexual orientation IS included. Each time domestic partner benefits are brought to the negotiation table by the CSEA Union or the Social Workers Union; it is not addressed and is discarded as a 'political' issue. It is not political it is discrimination.

Ironically, we live in a County that has Kodak, Bausch & Lomb, and Xerox, all of which have scored perfectly in the Human Rights Campaign's Equality Index and have been pioneers for their support for gay and lesbian employees. To be honest, I am embarrassed that Monroe County does NOT offer domestic partner benefits.

Bereavement leave, sick leave and health insurance are taken for granted by married employees. Currently gay and lesbian employees with Monroe County have no such benefits. This is not only unfair, it is cruel and discriminatory. How would you feel if your spouse died and you had to ask your supervisor for vacation time?

We are in the year 2006; If Monroe County is truly invested in partnering with businesses and academic institutions, than let me ask this question: What kind of message does it send to businesses about the integrity of Monroe County's policy of inclusion when you ignore your gay and lesbian employees? I ask you to do what the City of Rochester, Monroe Community College and the University of Rochester have already done - please include Domestic Partner benefits in the 2007 budget. Thank you.

Bess Watts/Open Arms Metropolitan Community Church/740 Marshal Road/Chili NY 14624
3 Rossmore St/Gates NY 14606/585-426-0862/besswhat@gmail.com

Anne's presentation to the Monroe County Legislators on 11/14/2006

Good Evening, I'm Anne Tischer from Open Arms Metropolitan Community Church in Chili. I am here to request action by this body in support of the state wide initiative for Marriage Equality for same-sex couples.

This week we will be submitting a request for a call to action to President Zyra for review.

Because I am gay, I am part of a hated minority. It wasn't always true for me. I grew up in the protected "vanilla" world of Pittsford and Fairport. I never spoke to a minority or person of color until I went away to College.

I knew nothing about what discrimination really feels like. I learned though, when I fell in love with a woman and overnight became part of a hated minority.

There are many folks in this room who can tell you about discrimination. One is my spouse Bess, who served in the U.S. Military, who works at Monroe Community College and is a Board trustee for our church. She had a total stranger attack her and knock out her front teeth, because she was gay.

My friend Lori will tell you about burying her partner of 29 years and then being forced to move out of their home a week later. Because, after 29 years together she was unable to collect any survivors benefits from Social Security or Lee's pension. Lori wasn't even entitled to paid time off for Lee's funeral.

This form of discrimination is just as traumatic as getting your teeth knocked out and is just as wrong.

Open Arms Church and other allies will be asking you to take a stand to end the discrimination against same-sex couples. We will be contacting each of you for support.

Thanks for listening tonight.

10/18/04

I'm Anne Tischer from Open Arms Metropolitan Community Church. I'm here with my spouse Bess to ask you to draft a resolution in support of Marriage Equality for same-sex couples.

Civil marriage creates roughly 1300 Federal and 500 State, legal protections and benefits for heterosexual couples. As a taxpayer and citizen, I want equal access to those benefits for my relationship of 12 years. Protecting the legal and financial security of my family is as vital to me as yours is to you.

Bess & I have tried legally to duplicate the 1800 benefits of civil marriage. It has resulted in a patchwork of documents that falls woefully short of the mark. We have matched only a handful of the 1800 benefits of civil marriage.

- We filed for Domestic Partner rights, so I have health insurance coverage under Bess, but we must pay $200.00 in extra taxes monthly that straight couples do not.
- Our Marriage in Canada got me survivor rights to Bess's State pension, but not to her Social Security if she dies.
- My living will and health care proxy MAY insure that Bess gets to see me and make my health decisions if needed – IF I am in a New York hospital and the attending Doctor is not a homophobe.
- We filed a 6 page Burial Determination Form, just to insure that Bess will be able to claim my remains and make burial decisions if I die.
- Our Wills, Powers-of- Attorney and partnership agreements are only as good as the attorney who created them. They don't come close to duplicating married spouse's protections.

Bess and I need Civil Marriage to share the same legal, financial and social benefits you have access to. Please draft a resolution to Albany in support of Marriage Equality for same-sex couples.

Thank you.

Bess' presentation to the Monroe County Legislators on 12/12/2006

Hello, my name is Bess Watts from Open Arms Metropolitan Community Church. I am here with my spouse, Anne; we have been together 12 years and recently married in Canada. I am here today to ask you to provide domestic partner benefits for all of your employees.

I find it ironic that at the beginning of each legislature meeting that we rise and recite the Pledge of Allegiance "**I Pledge Allegiance to the flag of the United States of America ...One Nation under God, with liberty and justice for all.**" Justice for all? Is it justice that Monroe County continues to ignore their gay and lesbian employees by not offering domestic partner benefits? New York State, the City of Rochester, the Counties of Albany, Suffolk and Westchester, among others, all provide domestic partner benefits. Why don't we? The business sector has long realized the need to recognized and treat gay and lesbians employees equally, the majority of Fortune 500 companies now offer domestic partner benefits. Kodak has been the leader, having sexual orientation in their non-discrimination policy since ***1986!***

What a shame that Monroe County, home of Susan B. Anthony and Frederick Douglass have yet to embrace inclusiveness and diversity as a strength. If you are unwilling to stand up and treat your employees equally than I ask that the next time when you stand and recite the pledge of allegiance, in order for you to not violate your pledge, consider saying these words OUT LOUD "One nation, under God with Liberty and Justice for all, e***xcept Gays and Lesbians".*** Thank you.

SMILE

Good Evening,

I'm Anne Tischer and I'm here to ask Monroe County to withdraw the appeal of the Martinez decision and to stop discriminating toward gay and lesbian County employees.

appealed the decision and

"Trickle down intolerance" was initiated when Mrs. Brooks publicly declared that it is ok to discriminate against legally married same-sex couples like Bess & I, by denying us benefit equity. Mrs. Brooks set an example of intolerance for the community that ends up costing everyone:

By denying employee

hurting people

Within weeks of the appeal, a young gay man who grew up in Spencerport, was beaten unconscious in a local pub there in an anti-gay hate crime. I spoke to the young man – he is in disbelief that it could happen here. And the "trickle down" message to every gay kid in Spencerport and Monroe County is that you are not safe here. You are not wanted here.

Is intolerance the message we want to send the world?

I often mention the studies linking thriving economies to inclusion and multiculturalism, ~~and~~ You know we are losing the young and gifted talents from this area.

Now, between the County's Martinez appeal and this subsequent hate crime, there are hundreds of blogs and media articles advertising Monroe County not as the home of suffrage and civil rights, but as the home of intolerance.

It matters…

A gay surgeon from our church just left the area to find a "friendlier" ~~environment~~ place to build his practice in.

And last week Bess helped move furniture being sold by a heterosexual couple in their mid-twenties leaving Rochester because quote "it is backwards and going nowhere'. This is how we project now.

I don't like it…

Please withdraw the Martinez appeal and offer benefit equity to all Monroe County employees.

Discrimination ~~hurts everyone~~ is hurting our County.

Thank you

SMILE

Good evening,

I am Anne Tischer, a former County Social Service employee who now works for ViaHealth/Rochester General Hospital. I have shared my life with Bess Watts for 14 years. We have been married in our church, married in a public venue ~~with a dozen clergy attending~~ and finally we got legally married in Canada.

Today I took my Canadian marriage certificate to Human Resources at Via Health and asked for a written verification of what benefits Bess & I could expect from our "legally married" status… If ~~Bess dies~~ will I get bereavement time to bury her? If I die first will she get my pension as my surviving spouse? As a hospital worker I see daily how vital it is to plan ahead and have protections in place for yourself and your family in the event of a life crisis. So I have to ask these things… They had no answers – they got a little huffy ~~only honor Domestic partnership so~~ sent my request ~~is headed~~ to legal.

~~How did the experience make me feel~~? Bear in mind that unlike you, I ~~had~~ to put my job on the line to ask such questions, to see if my spouse and I will get common protections. I have no union to protect me. ~~Despite being a heck of a good worker~~, I am 56 and have 2 chronic ~~disabling~~ diseases to contend with. They can get rid of me because my eyes are blue…

So how did I feel assertively telling the Benefits officer that I DID NOT want Domestic Partner benefits. I wanted spousal benefits? I felt anxious, alone and separate from all my co-workers. I felt TIRED…but mostly I felt rock solid committed to living with integrity and self worth. ~~As Susan Anthony put it failure is impossible, and~~ I did the RIGHT thing today & ask you to do the right thing. ~~So I'd like to wish you a~~

Please support benefit equity for all Monroe County Employees

Thank you

Good Evening. My name is Bess Watts and I am here to continue our discussion about domestic partner benefits for Monroe County employees.

Monroe County is the home of great institutions like Xerox, Kodak, Nixon Peabody, the City of Rochester, Strong Memorial Hospital, the University of Rochester, Bausch & Lomb, Via Health, R.I.T, ~~the Town of Brighton,~~ ITT, Monroe Community College and too many others to mention. All of these institutions offer domestic partner benefits for their employees, which they recognize creates an environment where all employees can flourish. Employee satisfaction increases and customer service improves, leading to better community relations. Offering benefit equity also provides an advantage in recruiting and retaining top talent to their institutions.

When I mention to people that Monroe County does not have domestic partner benefits, I am met with disbelief; it is an embarrassment because Monroe County and Rochester are known for their progressive and inclusive history. We are trying to woo bring in progressive companies to the area while we as a county demonstrate dated, provincial attitudes by refusing domestic partner benefits to our own employees. We have to think differently to improve our economy and revitalize this area. Excluding rather than including sends the wrong message. Thank you for listening.

Goodevening

I'm Anne Tischer, advocating for domestic partner benefits for all Monroe County employees.

I remember an interesting psychology study done concerning worker productivity. Office workers were told that their company was changing their lighting from incandescent bulbs to fluorescent, because fluorescent lighting would make it easier for them to do their jobs. The bulbs were changed and WORKER productivity went way up.

Then the workers were told that the new lights were not effective and the original incandescent bulbs were reinstalled. Productivity went up even higher. Obviously the increase had nothing to do with the type of lights used. Productivity went up because employees perceived that management cared about them and their working environment…

Many Monroe County employees are over worked, beaten down and cynical about management concern for them. Backlogs are up and efficiency is down as employees try to do more with less in a thankless environment. Their frustration is felt by their customers in the community too.

One thing you, the legislature, can do to help is to offer your employees access to domestic partner benefits. Statistics predict that only a handful of employees will in fact sign up for such benefits and that the costs are negligible. But offering such benefits sends a powerful symbolic message to all employees that you are concerned about benefit equity, and the well-being of all your workers. That message of respect and concern can only improve morale and productivity in your workforce. Its a good idea

Thanks for listening.

Good evening

Quoting from yesterday's

– *New York Times* editorial 2008 Nicholas Confessore

recent gay marriage

"For many Democratic members of the Assembly, last year's passage of a bill to legalize same-sex marriage was the culmination of years of battle and persuasion within their party's ranks, and most of them eventually supported the legislation.

For the four Assembly Republicans who supported the bill, the vote was potentially far more risky: a public break with their own party on an issue that at the time was considered in some quarters to be radioactive, potentially even career-killing.

But the experience of Assemblywoman Teresa Sayward suggests that those fears may be unwarranted.

Ms. Sayward, a three-term Republican from the North Country, an observant Roman Catholic in a heavily Catholic district, surprised many of her colleagues last year when she rose to speak in support of the bill, reflecting on her own experiences coming to terms with the fact that her son, Glenn, was gay.

More surprising — to Ms. Sayward, anyway—was the response from her constituents after news of the vote percolated through her district. More than three-fifths of those who contacted her office about the issue said they either agreed with her position or respected her willingness to make a stand on principle.

"We did get some of those very heated phone calls and letters as we expected to get," she said. "But we didn't get as many as you'd think. We got an excellent reception." Some letters, she said, came from parents who had kept quiet about their own gay children for years. "They decided they were no longer going to be secretive," Ms. Sayward said. "That touched my heart the most."

Ultimately, no corresponding bill came to a vote in the Republican-controlled State Senate. But gay-rights groups say they believe that the lack of a public outcry over last year's Assembly vote will help them next year in the Senate.

Comments on the "lack of a public outcry" over last years Assembly vote

Per Alan Van Capelle, director of the Empire State Pride Agenda civil rights group, which has been meeting with Albany lawmakers on the issue each week. "People are not afraid of gay marriage. It's just not a wedge issue any more in New York State." End quote.

Monroe County should forgo further legal appeals of the Martinez decision which recognizes out-of-state same-sex marriages like mine and Bess's. It wastes taxpayer money, it hurts our economy, it promotes intolerance and discrimination and it turns out you can't even make political hay out of it...let's move to stop the appeals.

Thank you

Justifying Monroe County's plan to appeal the Martinez decision, in which New York State recognizes same-sex marriages, Maggie Brooks stated, "We must appeal this decision *in order to protect Monroe County taxpayers. We cannot simply extend benefits to unmarried couples* ..." She forgets that Monroe County gay and lesbian residents also pay taxes. And it is simple equity that gay and lesbian county employees get the same benefits for their families as extended to their heterosexual co-workers, especially given the State law against workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Rochester-Finger Lakes Chapter of Pride at Work educates legislators and unions about the need for domestic partner or same-sex spousal benefits including health insurance for partners and children, family and bereavement leave and survivor pension rights. Employees in committed same-sex relationships face benefit discrimination regularly. While heterosexual married co-workers get sick time or bereavement leave for their spouse's illness or death, gay employees must request "vacation". Domestic partners are also taxed heavily for the value of obtained health benefits.

Data demonstrates the increased cost to implement domestic partner benefits is insignificant at less than 1%. Eastman Kodak, University of Rochester and the Town of Brighton provide these benefits as good for employers and workers alike. Monroe County by contrast denies worker equity, which fosters system-wide disrespect for those deemed "second class" employees with "insignificant" families.

Today's thriving economies are correlated to an area's ability to attract talented innovators. These "creative class" people value multiculturalism and see inclusion of gay people in particular, as an index of their own compatibility to an area. Monroe County, already struggling with job losses and "brain drain", put another nail in the area's economic coffin. While county leadership persists in myopic provincialism, the region will continue its decline. Don't marginalize good employees, embrace them equally. It benefits everyone.

Bess Watts, President
Rochester Finger Lakes Chapter of *Pride at Work
www.prideatwork.org

** National Pride at Work is affiliated as a constituency group of the AFL-CIO. The purpose of Pride at Work is to mobilize mutual support between the organized Labor Movement and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community to promote social and economic justice.*

Good evening. My name is Alice Harrington. I'm also here to urge you to provide domestic partner benefits to Monroe County employees.

I never really thought about this issue until I shared an office with Bess Watts. Bess' 12 –year-long relationship with her partner, Anne Tischer, has become a model for me as I prepare for my own marriage to my fiancé, Paul. Bess and Anne are as committed to each other as any heterosexual couple I know yet if they were Monroe County employees they would not have the same rights as their straight colleagues because they cannot legally marry.

I believe that same-sex couples will someday have the full protections of civil marriage. For now the few advantages domestic partner benefits provide would make a big difference to gay couples and families. They would have access to some of the same benefits designed to support other families – like bereavement time and health care coverage. My workplace now offers domestic partner benefits to any committed couple regardless of sexual orientation and has found the cost to be inconsequential.

Domestic partner benefits should be extended to all Monroe county employees as a matter of equity in pay because it is the right thing to do. Please demonstrate that you value all employees of our county by providing them with domestic partner benefits. Thank you.

Todd Plank presented this story to the legislature on 1/9/2007

I am a teacher who has worked in several different school districts throughout my career. My previous two employers recognized domestic partnerships, and my partner could therefore be added to my health insurance, as was my daughter when she was born. All that was required was a notarized affidavit certifying that we had lived together for at least four years.

I am currently employed by a district within Monroe County that does not recognize either our domestic partnership or our Canadian marriage. Because of this my partner must purchase more expensive insurance from her employer, and we pay much more for health insurance than do my heterosexually married co-workers. Luckily, I was able to adopt my now 3-year-old daughter, and she is covered under my benefits. We are expecting our second child within the next month or so, but I will not be able to have this baby on my health insurance until the second-parent adoption is finalized, which is generally a 6 - 8 month process.

Until that comes through, our second daughter will not be legally recognized as my child. My family should not be denied benefits simply because our legal Canadian marriage is not recognized in New York State. My partner and I have been together for 12 years and in all respects live as any other married couple with children. We share all of the responsibilities and challenges that come with such a commitment and our primary concern is for our children's security and well being. We ask that you recognize the importance of domestic partnership benefits for gay and lesbian families.

Good Evening

My Summer Vacation by Yasmin Ayyub

I have been a caseworker with MCDHS for the past 8 years. This summer, my partner, Linda had to have emergency knee replacement surgery. I initially took a few days off to be with her. It became obvious that I would need to spend more time at home to care for her. My supervisor suggested to me that maybe I could hire a teenager to care for her. After my supervisor called my home looking for me and spoke to my partner, Linda and told her " I really need to have Yasmin at work" after Linda had told her that I was on my way to work. I decided at this point that I needed to apply for FMLA. I had the paperwork completed by the physician and personally returned it to Personnel. After not hearing back from Personnel for several days, I contacted the Personnel office and was told the following, " as a Christian I do not agree with it, but as a minority I do not believe in discrimination." This statement was shocking to me. I was told that it would be denied because my partner is not a family member. I asked for the denial in writing and what was sent to me made no mention of partner, but rather stated that because the patient was no relation to me that it was denied. No relation to me, Linda is not a stranger to me, we have been partners for almost 11 years. I would note that the doctor asked for me to stay home for 3 weeks to care for Linda. I took a total of 3 days which were not consecutive or total days.

This experience left me feeling very devalued. My married peers would not have had to endure what I experienced this summer. I am asking the Monroe County Legislature to offer domestic partnership benefits. I am asking this as a Monroe County Employee, But more importantly I am asking you to do this because it is the right thing to do.

Thank You.

Speech to Monroe County Legislature 1/09/07

Good evening. My name is Sherri Munger. I am a teacher, and I reside with my partner of nearly 12 years in Spencerport, where we are both constituents. I'd like to tell you why marriage equality for same-sex partners is important to me.

When my partner, Donna, had to undergo major surgery at a local hospital, the hospital staff would not answer my questions or update me with reports on her condition despite the fact that I was her healthcare proxy and had the legal paperwork in my hand. They recognized her parents as next-of-kin and spoke only to them.

We are registered with the city of Rochester as domestic partners; however, domestic partnerships do not establish kinship or provide the legal protections and rights that marriage allows under New York State law. Additionally, domestic partnerships are not understood or recognized by the vast majority of citizens, as I experienced firsthand.

Extending marriage to same-sex couples means extending equality, fairness, and civil rights to all citizens. While I do not believe that marriage is the right option for everyone, I know it is the only option that will give me and my partner full equality, and allow us the same civil rights and responsibilities that our heterosexual counterparts enjoy. Civil marriage is the only institution through which our state fully recognizes and protects families. That is why I am asking you to draft a resolution to New York State lawmakers asserting that same-sex couples should have the same legal, financial, and social benefits and protections that civil marriage provides any other couple in New York State.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Good Evening, I'm Mrs. Tischer and I'm here to ask Mrs. Brooks and this body to rescind the appeal of the Martinez decision and to stop discrimination toward gay, lesbian bisexual and transgendered county employees.

"Trickle down intolerance" was put into play when Mrs. Brooks publicly declared that it is ok to discriminate against legally married same-sex couples like Bess & I. Mrs. Brooks set the example for the community to follow and it costs everyone:

Within a week a young gay man who grew up in Spencerport named Lance Neve was beaten unconscious in a local pub there in a hate crime. I talked to Lance – he never thought it could happen in his home town. The message is clear to every gay kid in Spencerport – you are not safe here.

You have repeatedly heard me mention the studies that show how thriving economies correlate to tolerance and multiculturalism and you know we are losing the young and gifted talents from this area.

So between the Martinez appeal and the subsequent hate crime there are hundreds of blogs and articles on the internet now advertising Monroe County intolerance.
Think is doesn't matter?

A gay surgeon from our church just left the area to find a friendlier environment to live. And last week Bess & I looked at furniture being sold by a 25 year old straight business woman heading to Seattle where they have quote "more progressive" attitudes? Honest I did not coach her…

Please rescind the Martinez appeal. Intolerance hurts every person in the county.

Thank you

Anne's presentation to the Monroe County Legislators on 01/09/2007

I'm Anne Tischer, speaking tonight for the Social Action for Marriage Equality coalition. Yesterday I had a great talk with President Zyra about Domestic Partner benefits for Monroe County employees and Marriage Equality for same sex couples. We discussed how hard these issues are for politicians to deal with and how uninformed the general public and most legislators are about these topics. I appreciated his candor and will be providing LOTS of reading material to this body as a result of his comments.

But what surprised me as I left his office was how empowered I felt. Regardless of his opinion of my requests, Mr. Zyra had taken the time to try to help me be better and more effective at whatever I was trying to achieve…what a great quality he demonstrated to foster the best in someone knowing that ultimately it benefits everyone…

When I ask you as legislators to help advocate for Marriage Equality for same-sex couples it is prompted by that same spirit. There is great value in empowering each and every person in our community to become all they are capable of. Each time we help a same-sex couple protect their children, build security for their homes, flourish as individuals and as committed couples, we strengthen our entire community. As a society we can use our energies to oppress people or we can help them fly...

I am respectfully asking for your help in advancing Marriage Equality legislation at the State level in the form of a resolution to the State Assembly, the State Senate and the governor supporting marriage equity for all couples in New York.

Thank you for listening.

I bet you know why I'm here

Good Evening I am Anne Tischer ~~and I am asking you to support equal marriage rights for all your constituents~~.

Can you remember the civil rights struggles in the 1960s – it is hard to believe some of the awful things that went on. I watched TV as Governor George Wallace blocked the first young black students from entering the University of Alabama saying "segregation today, segregation tomorrow , segregation forever" …I remember speakers ranting, using the bible to justify Jim Crow. And they claimed to be "protecting the sanctity of marriage" as they outlawed interracial marriage… In 1967 there were 16 states with laws prohibiting interracial marriage…~~b~~The bigots simply failed – justice prevailed despite any roadblocks ~~they tried~~ that were erected. 40 years later we have a black man running for president – the son of an interracial couple. ~~And I am proud of America.~~

Today you see another version of the same old story ~~of hate~~…intolerant people trying to legislate against same-sex couples saying they are "protecting the sanctity of marriage" Once again they selectively use passages from their bibles to justify bear discrimination. I ~~notice they completely ignore the directives to stone divorcees~~…

~~And~~ currently they got 26 states to pass laws prohibiting same-sex marriage. ~~But~~ But history predicts that justice will prevail. So my question to you is this – what side of history do you want to come out on – for discrimination or against it? I'm not sure neutral silence is an option for decent people when the debate is about civil rights and justice.
As Martin Luther King put it: "At the end of the day it is not the hateful words of our enemies we remember, it is the silence of our friends".

Please speak up for justice. Sign the marriage equality resolution offered by the Minority leader, encourage the County to forgo further challenges to the Martinez decision and finally provide domestic partner benefits to your County employees.

Thank you for listening

Good Evening,

My name is Anne Tischer. I am a member of the Rochester Chapter of Pride at Work, an AFL-CIO constituency group, that addresses gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender issues in the workplace.

As you know, my spouse is Bess Watts, who is Vice President of CSEA Unit 7402 at Monroe Community College, and President of the local chapter of Pride at Work. She couldn't be here, so I am speaking for us both…which she claims I do anyways…

I'm here to advocate for domestic partner benefits for all Monroe County employees, regardless of sexual orientation.

- **Over the past two years you have heard many speakers describe the desperate need, of a few unmarried couples and families, to get access to health care coverage.**
- **You have seen data concerning the negligible cost to the County, of offering domestic partner benefits to its employees.**
- **You know that offering domestic partner benefits is standard practice, embraced by big business to attract and retain talented employees, and to increase productivity, by offering equitable benefits to all employees.**
- **You have heard the studies that link thriving, new growth economies, to inclusion, multiculturalism and diversity….**

- **4 years ago the County approved domestic partner benefits for CSEA and NYSUT faculty and staff at Monroe Community College.**
- **Now contract negotiations have begun with other County unions.**
- **We urge you to insist on domestic partner benefits in all contracts, for all county employees. It makes sense and it's the right thing to do.**
- **Thank you.**

as a responsible employer

Stop both!

Protect all your employees

Happy New Year.

My name is Bess Watts. My spouse Anne Tischer and I are here to advocate for an end to the overt discrimination faced by many Monroe County employees, and to insure that benefit equity and domestic partner benefits are available to **all** county employees and their families.

In May of last year County Executive Maggie Brooks was quoted as saying "My job as County Executive is to look at the big picture. I have 4,200 employees that work in county government and to treat one group of employees differently from another group sets a precedent" end quote.

This statement reflects a principle of good leadership, but it must be applied broadly or it becomes a cynical testimony to selective discrimination, ~~for political expediency~~. for political reasons

It's impossible to espouse **equity and fairness** for **just some** employees, without consciously choosing **selective discrimination** against the rest. There is **no middle ground.**

Your employees need domestic partner benefits. **All** county employees need to protect their families **equally**. ~~Are you espousing fairness for all or choosing to selectively discriminate?~~

It is time to move forward – by creating a resolution offering domestic partner benefits so all employees will be treated the same. Thank you.

Bike TRAILS appeal to the Tway folks

Good Evening. My name is Bess Watts and I am here to continue our discussion about domestic partner benefits for Monroe County employees.

Tomorrow night County Executive Maggie Brooks will be delivering her State of the County address at the University of Rochester, last year she did the same at ~~Rochester Institute of Technology~~ RIT – both of these academic institutions, along with Monroe Community College offer domestic partner benefits to their employees. They prove their understanding of the value of inclusion and diversity by implementing policies which create an environment where everyone is welcome and treated equally in the workplace. They attract and retain talented employees by offering equitable benefits so employees can protect their families, regardless of how those families are structured.

Heterosexual

Traditional two parent families are no longer the majority of households in America or Monroe County – the time is overdue to recognize that we need to support our employees even if their family structure varies from yours. Contract negotiations are currently in process and I urge you to insist that domestic partner benefits be included for Monroe County employees. Monroe County must model the progressive future if it hopes to build a 'community of innovators, artists and entrepreneurs" to renew our local economy.

Mtn. Trail Bike

Thank you for listening.

Of Mountain Bike TRAILS will help slow the bleeding for Monroe County

Good Afternoon. My name is Bess Watts and I am here to speak to you again about domestic partner benefits for Monroe County employees.

Monroe County's Non-Discrimination Policy reads:
Monroe County government prohibits discrimination in employment, program activities, procurement and contracting against any person due to such person's age, marital status, disability, genetic predisposition or carrier status, race, color, creed, sexual orientation, sex or national origin.

Not offering benefits to committed heterosexual partners who choose not to marry is discrimination based on marital status. Not offering benefits to committed couples who identify as gay or lesbian is discrimination based on sexual orientation. Since non-married people in committed relationships do not have equitable benefits as their married counterparts, there is a disparity in benefit pay in the workplace for some employees, which appears to be in violation of Monroe County's Non-discrimination policy.

For the last six months concerned citizens like myself have distributed literature, have shared our stories with you, and have met face to face with legislators. We are asking only for this body to uphold its own policy. Now is the time to act and treat all of Monroe County Employees with equity. Please urge the legislature leadership of both parties to take action on this issue and demonstrate a commitment to fairness for all of your employees. Thank you.

My name is Bess Watts; I am the President of the Rochester-Finger Lakes Chapter of Pride at Work, an AFL-CIO constituency group that educates and advocates for social and economic justice for gays and lesbians in the workplace. I have spoken to you for almost 2 years on the need for domestic partner benefits for Monroe County employees. Several of our Pride at Work members are Monroe County employees and their families are adversely impacted because of the County's failure to provide domestic partner benefit equity, especially health care access. These employees work in a hostel work environment where disrespect and bias is modeled by their employer. Gay & lesbian employees are marginalized and excluded from the same protections and benefits that their co-workers receive.

Tonight I ask you to support a resolution providing domestic partner benefits. Furthermore I ask that you not use domestic partner benefits as a bargaining chip in contract negotiations. Domestic partner benefits are a matter of equity in the workplace. In reality few people will take advantage of domestic partner benefits due to the high tax consequences, but symbolically it shows that Monroe County values ALL of its employees.

Last week Mr. Reilich the recommend new GOP chairman stated that he was for the "inclusion of all" in a fresh approach to guiding his party. Does he mean the gay and lesbian residents of Monroe County too? His past voting record does not show "inclusion of all" but we ~~will see~~ Shall see --...

If Monroe County is genuinely seeking new paths to promote the common good, it will provide equitable ~~domestic partner~~ benefits to its employees. Thank you.

Good evening, my name is Bess Watts.

The headlines from yesterday's USA Today read: "N.Y. Gays Dash to Altar via California". Thousands of New York couples ~~are~~ headed to California to marry in an attempt to secure some legal and financial protections for their families here in New York State. We know of 3 couples ourselves – county employees and teachers. What a shame that these couples are forced to make their vows of lifelong commitment in another state, away from loving family and friends. And what a shame they are leaving their wedding revenues in California and not here in Monroe County.

And when they return and file for their very limited and highly taxed spousal benefits they will face a painful exposure to second class citizenship guaranteed to make marriage equality activists out of them.

We need <u>full</u> civil marriage rights to get the protections that matter. With civil marriage, we can live our lives secure in the knowledge that we have the same legal rights, responsibilities, obligations, and protections that other taxpayers enjoy. Without marriage, instead of security, we have fear. A fear that is always there. The fear that at the moments we are most vulnerable, sick, old, afraid, and alone, our state could step in and take everything away from us – just because we cannot have a civil marriage in New York. Please support the Monroe County marriage resolution urging marriage equality for same sex couples. *Thank you.*

Carl Sandburg was once asked what he thought was the ugliest word in the English language. He thought for a minute and replied, "Exclusion." I'm speaking to you again about the need for domestic partner benefits for Monroe County employees. Allow me to share what this means to me on a personal level.

Four years ago, while working at Monroe Community College, I had to use all of my vacation time for the year to take care of my partner, Anne, after she had major surgery. A year later I had to take vacation time to be by Anne's side as her mother lay dying and to attend her mother's funeral. Under the exact same circumstances my married peers would have been able to take sick time and bereavement leave.

These life-changing events left me feeling resentful that I was not valued or treated equally as an employee at MCC, I was excluded. I decided to do something about this inequity, so I researched and fought for domestic partner benefits at MCC, which I am glad to say that MCC now offers. I believe that MCC realized that we could not claim a diverse workforce without treating everyone equally. Now I am proud to be an employee at MCC, I feel valued for who I am, as well as for what I do. To me having domestic partner benefits represents inclusion, respect and appreciation.

I ask that the Monroe County legislature and the Federation of Social Workers and CSEA Local 828, follow MCC's lead and offer domestic partner benefits for all Monroe county employees. Thank you.

Good evening and thank you for this opportunity to speak before you. My name is Debbie Krusemark and I was born and raised right here in Rochester. For the past twenty-five years I have been an employee of Eastman Kodak. These are very challenging times at Kodak, which makes it not always easy to be a cheerleader for the company.

Yet, however difficult these times are, I am always thankful that Kodak took a stand and offered domestic partnership benefits. This action of inclusion continues to motivate me as a worker and reminds me that I am a valuable company employee. Domestic partnership benefits, along with other company benefits continues to place Kodak on the following list,

100 Best Companies for Working Mothers.

50 Best Companies for Latinas to Work for in the U.S.

100% score in Human Rights Campaign Corporate Equality Index.

Being on these and other list continues to draw highly skilled, poetical employees to Kodak even in these challenging times.

As a member of the Rochester community I encourage you to offer domestic partnership benefits for Monroe County. Not only is it the right thing to do, but it also makes good business sense. It made good business sense to Kodak, Xerox, and other area companies who offer domestic partnership benefits. They believed it is one of the ways to drawn good, skilled, young employees into their workforce.

The beauty of Monroe County's parks and lakes, our cultural attractions, museums, galleries, and theaters, our colleges and universities, our history and diversity creates an attractive environment to work, play, and call home. Yet these assets are not enough, Monroe County needs to be competitive if it wants to attract and keep jobs here in upstate New York. Domestic partnership benefits are one of the ways to do just that.

Thank you-

COUNTY LEGISLATURE RE: DOMESTIC PARTNER BENEFITS 7.8.08

My Name is Tom Privitere

I'm a resident of the Town of Pittsford, a constituent of County Legislator Danielle's, and a lifelong resident of Monroe County.

I attended Monroe Community College, the Rochester Institute of Technology and Cornell University.

I have been employed as Western New York Director of Field Services for the New York State Public Employee's Federation AFL-CIO for the past 23 years. I am also Vice President of the Rochester-Finger Lakes Chapter of Pride At Work—an advocacy arm of the AFL-CIO monitoring diversity in the workplace.

PEF is a Union representing 58,000 professional, scientific and technical employees who work for the State of New York. That have had access to Domestic Partner Benefits since 1995.

My purpose tonight is to present you with copies of correspondence sent last week to Monroe County Executive Maggie Brooks seeking extension of Domestic Partner Benefits to your County Employees.

Attached to this correspondence are statistical data citing the numerous Private & Public Sector Employers who have been providing this benefit for, in some cases, more than 20 years. One of these is your very own Monroe Community College.

With the University of Rochester being the largest single employer in our Community, we are rapidly becoming known as a magnet for Higher Education. We are educating thousands of young people annually at the college level, only to see them graduate and move elsewhere.

Studies show that these upwardly mobile young people use criteria such as Domestic Partner Benefits as part of their "litmus test" in assessing prospective employment. 2 of my own 3 children live outside of Monroe County due to the lack of local incentives available to them in their fields.

I would urge you to stop this Trail of Tears at our Airport. Monroe County, as an Employer, must be competitive with and consistent in its vision for growth and prosperity. Please read both the letter and attachments from myself and PAW President Bess Watts, herself an employee of MCC, to Ms. Brooks. Monroe County lags behind the State of New York, the City of Rochester, the Rochester City School District, the Town of Brighton and its own Community College in an apparent DISPARATE approach to good government.

I urge Mssrs. Zyra and Bronson to work with County Executive Brooks in providing a non partisan solution to the Domestic Partner Benefits issue for both current and, hopefully, FUTURE County Employees.

Thank You.

Good Evening. My name is Bess Watts –

I had never been involved in the political process before we started advocating here for domestic partner benefits for Monroe County employees. Looking back at our efforts I believed that if we educated the legislature by speaking, by providing literature, and by meeting with the President, the majority leader, and others, we would clearly demonstrate the discrimination and disparity in the workplace and you would correct them. Apparently it is not so simple.

Politically, there seems to be reluctance to take the lead to provide health care insurance for eligible employees who are domestic partners, but I am convinced that the majority of legislators here feel it is the right thing to do. This is why we are not going away. However, we will be giving you a break for the next 2 months while we paint our house and catch up with our chores.

Majority Leader Bill Smith, thank you for meeting with us to discuss this important issue. As you are leaving and have demonstrated that you are a fair minded individual I would like to extend a personal invitation for you to come back in the fall and speak on behalf of equity on all employees at the County.

Thank you, we will see you in September. Enjoy your summer!

Good Evening, I am Anne Tischer and I am here to advocate for Domestic Partner benefits for Monroe County employees.

I am bringing you an article by Richard Florida, author of a book called "Rise of the Creative Class ~~You will find it interesting.~~

The author looks at the new paradigms needed to attract and keep a critical segment of people, he calls "the creative class", who are the true engine for economic vitality in an area. They bring the innovation, energy and skills that carry an economy into the future.

Mr. Florida shows how old models of economic development – building high tech office parks and sports stadiums have proved ineffective at attracting and retaining talent in an area. Instead, an area's lifestyle options, quality of life amenities, cultural diversity and evidence of tolerant attitudes is proving to be the more essential factor in attracting today's creative class.

Why should you care? When I was a Monroe County employee at Social Services it was obvious they had enormous budget and productivity problems. Then and now they need creative people at all levels working on solutions to the complex problems they have. As a ~~lowly~~ mere clerk at Xerox I once produced an idea that saved the company $104,000. a year. Xerox ~~offered an environment that~~ fostered my creativity by repeatedly showing me that I was valued – as a woman, as a gay person, as a unique thinker. ~~I worked my heart out for them.~~ Corporations understand the value of promoting diversity…

But how about Monroe County employees? – How do we recruit and keep ~~enough~~ talent in the County in the midst of the regional brain drain? Despite good pay and benefits, Social Services is a frustrating stagnant environment. People work hard but have no hope or vision. They question whether it is a safe place for them to think ~~uniquely~~ interpersonally and speak up. ~~As one indicator - gay people stay in the closet at the County. I promise you if gay people don't feel valued, respected and safe, then creative people don't. Lack of visible diversity and tolerance will hobble your best problem solvers and that hobbles your chance of success.~~

I urge you to grant Domestic Partner benefits to county employees as the ~~first step in the "climate change that will draw new vitality to our County and our hard working county employees.~~ a clear message of the value you hold for them.

Thank you

They look for signs of visible diversity + tolerance as proof of how they will be accepted. Offering Equity of Benefits is a certain way to demonstrate that all employees are valued and all voices and ideas are valued. Positive visible actions

4/13/06

Good evening, my name is Bess Watts. I am here to talk about the cost to the employer and steps involved when applying for domestic partner benefits.

Several studies have been conducted on the cost of DP benefits. The most recent 2005 Hewitt Associates study revealed that most employers experience a total benefits cost increase of less than 1%. This is due mostly to the small number of employees actually utilizing the benefit. Employed partners may already have health insurance, or they may be reluctant to reveal their relationship or are dissuaded by the complex application process or the tax consequences they have to pay for DP benefits. Unlike a married spouse, it costs me $3000.00 in extra taxes each year to have my partner, Anne, on my health insurance. This is because the value of my employer's contribution is added to my gross pay and is taxed accordingly.

At MCC, where I work, to become eligible for DP benefits you must complete a 2 page application certifying that you are over 18, unrelated and unmarried. You have to prove you have lived together for at least 1 year and must prove financial interdependence with 2 documents such as joint bank accounts, mortgages or joint credit cards. You need a notarized Domestic Partners Affidavit. Despite assumptions, studies show that in the past 20 years zero cases of fraud involving DP benefits have been identified.

In spite of the rigors of getting DP benefits, for some unmarried couples and their families, availability of health care coverage is crucial to their family's health and financial well being. It is also a matter of equity in compensation and validation of their worth as employees.

I am confident that Monroe County, CSEA Local 828 and the Federation of Social Workers Union will initiate and approve a Memorandum of Agreement that will extend DP benefits to ALL their employees. It's the right thing to do. Thank you.

4/13/2004

My name is Sue Wasson and I am here to talk about Domestic Partner benefits and Marriage Equality. I currently work for Lowe's Home Centers as the Area Operations Manager for Western New York. I have the benefit of working for a company which has long recognized Domestic Partners and tried to offer an equitable range of benefits to ALL their employees. That is a big part of why I originally joined the company and was recently willing to transfer here to Rochester, the sunshine capital of the country.

Despite the fact that I take large federal tax penalties for my DP benefits that married co-workers do not pay, I assure you that I would not have considered any position where DP benefits like health insurance, family leave and bereavement leave were not available to me. Like anyone else, I need to protect my home and family. So I do encourage you to offer DP benefits to ALL Monroe County employees. But I also hope you recognize that the bigger need is for you to support Marriage Equality legislation at the State level.

Here is why: I once sat in a hospital waiting room with a friend whose partner of 20 years lay dying in another room as the result of a terrible auto accident. I tried to find the words to console my friend who was not allowed by the hospital staff to see her partner to say "goodbye " or "I love you" before she died, because she was not "immediate family". My friend had legal paperwork establishing their relationship that was not recognized by the hospital staff and there was no time to get it legally straightened out. I tried to convince my friend that her loved partner "knew" she was there anyway, but internally I felt fury as I sat there helplessly. It was senseless cruelty and it happened simply because they were a same-sex couple.

Frankly I pay a lot of taxes here in New York and in Monroe County. I am respected in my profession, contribute to my church and build Habitat for Humanity houses in my spare time… why should I be treated like a second class citizen here in my adopted home because I happen to be gay?

Thank you for your time.

My name is Jan Seeley and I would like to speak tonight on behalf of young men and women who, upon graduation from high school or college, intend to migrate not only from Monroe County, but from New York State and the US to seek equal opportunities in Canada.

To quote an earnest mother:

"My son Cameron is a hardworking, tax-paying, law-abiding American citizen. He is an honor student, a National Merit Scholar and a dean's lest mainstay, well-liked by his teachers, peers and employers, a potential asset to the future of his country... but unfortunately his country will not be the United States. He is compelled to leave the only country he has ever known because he wants to marry the one person in the world who makes him happy, he wants to be able to visit him in the hospital when he's sick and have the same decision-making rights as heterosexuals. He wants to be able to take advantage of health insurance rates with his partner. He wants tax breaks and the ability to inherit shared assets without paying taxes. He wants the dignity that is afforded by the right to marry.

The country he loves so much is saying more and more loudly in state after state that he is not worthy of all the rights and privileges that heterosexuals can assume."

Canada has legalized same-sex marriage and has gay-friendly immigration laws. Please let Monroe County take the lead for New York State to among the first in our country to offer the same civil rights to all citizens... to be a true model of liberty and justice for all.

Thank you.

#115107

Good evening. My name is Traci Cahill. I am the co-president of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, otherwise known as PFLAG, of Genesee Valley.

Tomorrow, many of us will celebrate Valentine's Day. Regardless of how we celebrate, or whether we celebrate at all, love will be on the minds of many of us.

I am reminded of someone who I love more than anyone in the world: my sister, Keli. Keli is the first person I turn to when I've had a wonderful or terrible experience. She has seen me at my best, and at my worst, and roots for me no matter what. She has a beautiful soul and is incredibly sensitive. She is the funniest person I know and one of the few people who can make me laugh until my stomach hurts. I don't know what I would do without her. I am proud to call Keli my sister, and unbelievably lucky to call her my best friend.

Keli is a social worker in Monroe County. She specializes in adolescents who struggle with mental health issues and are at-risk of being removed from their homes. She is truly dedicated to the families she works with.

Keli is the reason that I am involved with PFLAG. She is a lesbian. The person that I love most in this world is not honored and respected by many, simply because of who she falls in love with. It devastates me that once she finds her life-partner, she will not be granted the hundreds of rights and protections that I will be granted, once I find mine.

So, on this eve of a holiday devoted to love and compassion, I ask you to provide domestic partner benefits to Monroe County Employees.

Thank you. Happy Valentine's Day.

Bess' presentation to the Monroe County Legislators on 1/9/2007

Carl Sandburg was once asked what he thought was the ugliest word in the English language. He thought for a minute and replied, "Exclusion." I'm speaking to you again about the need for domestic partner benefits for Monroe County employees. Allow me to share what this means to me on a personal level.

Four years ago, while working at Monroe Community College, I had to use all of my vacation time for the year to take care of my partner, Anne, after she had major surgery. A year later I had to take vacation time to be by Anne's side as her mother lay dying and to attend her mother's funeral. Under the exact same circumstances my married peers would have been able to take sick time and bereavement leave.

These life-changing events left me feeling resentful that I was not valued or treated equally as an employee at MCC, I was excluded. I decided to do something about this inequity, so I researched and fought for domestic partner benefits at MCC, which I am glad to say that MCC now offers. I believe that MCC realized that we could not claim a diverse workforce without treating everyone equally. Now I am proud to be an employee at MCC, I feel valued for who I am, as well as for what I do. To me having domestic partner benefits represents inclusion, respect and appreciation.

I ask that the Monroe County legislature and the Federation of Social Workers and CSEA Local 828, follow MCC's lead and offer domestic partner benefits for all Monroe county employees. Thank you.

I am Paul Scott

I've been asked to speak to the issue of domestic partnership benefits for Monroe County Employees.

As President of Mary Cariola Children's Center and an employer of 550 staff, we have worked hard to be the employer of choice. Over a decade ago, we addressed the issue of domestic partnership benefits.

We felt it was important to send a message to our staff that we value them and appreciate the commitment they make to our children and families.

We recognized that having a stable home life was important to all our staff and benefits such as health care and family sick leave and bereavement leave were valuable to all staff.

We instituted a policy that enabled individuals who were in committed domestic partnerships to have access to the same benefits as their coworkers. Such staff needed to file a domestic partnership statement and provide proof that they had been in this relationship for more than six months and had financial responsibilities for each other. We ask for three forms of documentation such as co-signatures on a mortgage or lease, joint bank accounts, credit cards, or joint financial responsibilities with utility companies.

We did it because we thought it was the right thing to do, but we naturally had concerns about the financial impact.

Our experience has been that the impact on staff morale has been very positive and it has been a valuable recruitment and retention tool. The financial implications have been minimal.

While 10 to 15 of our staff were probably eligible, we have only experienced a 2% utilization of medical and dental benefits.

We offer two medical plans – 300 staff and 6 domestic partners participate

Of 100 in the Basix Plan – 4 are in a two person domestic partnership

Of 200 in the Opportunity Plan – 2 are using domestic partnership as two person family membership

Dental – 204 staff enrolled and 4 are domestic partners

Why is the enrollment low? 2 person plans cost more than double what a single plan does.

The employee must pay income tax on the portion the Agency pays toward the partner's coverage.

Even though the benefit is available, most find maintaining separate plans is still cheaper.

The use of family sick leave and bereavement leave has been negligible.

I feel we have achieved a more committed and stable work force with the investment of very little money. Recruiting, hiring and retraining staff is expensive. Retaining good employees has out weighed the increased costs associated with domestic partnership benefits.

It's good business and the right thing to do.